



THE BILL OF RIGHTS

First Amendment

Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof; or abridging the freedom of speech, or of the press, or the right of the people peaceably to assemble, and to petition the Government for a redress of grievances.

Congress can't make any law about your religion, or stop you from practicing your religion, or keep you from saying whatever you want, or publishing whatever you want (like in a newspaper or a book). And Congress can't stop you from meeting peacefully for a demonstration to ask the government to change something.

Second Amendment

A well regulated Militia, being necessary to the security of a free State, the right of the people to keep and bear Arms, shall not be infringed.

Congress can't stop people from having and carrying weapons, because we need to be able to defend ourselves.

Third Amendment

No Soldier shall, in time of peace be quartered in any house, without the consent of the Owner; nor in time of war, but in a manner to be prescribed by law.

You don't have to let soldiers live in your house, except if there is a war, and even then only if Congress has passed a law about it.

Fourth Amendment

The right of the people to be secure in their persons, houses, papers, and effects, against unreasonable searches and seizures, shall not be violated, and no Warrants shall issue, but upon probable cause, supported by Oath or affirmation, and particularly describing the place to be searched, and the persons or things to be seized.

Nobody can search your body, or your house, or your papers and things, unless they can prove to a judge that they have a good reason to think you have committed a crime.

Fifth Amendment

No person shall be held to answer for a capital, or otherwise infamous crime, unless on a presentment or indictment of a Grand Jury, except in cases arising in the land or naval forces, or in the Militia, when in actual service in time of War or public danger; nor shall any person be subject for the same offence to be twice put in jeopardy of life or limb; nor shall be compelled in any criminal case to be a witness against himself; nor be deprived of life, liberty, or property, without due process of law; nor shall private property be taken for public use without just compensation.

You can't be tried for any serious crime without a Grand Jury meeting first to decide whether there's enough evidence for a trial. And if the jury decides you are innocent, the government can't try again with another jury. You don't have to say anything at your trial. You can't be killed, or put in jail, or fined, unless you were convicted of a crime by a jury. And the government can't take your house or your farm or anything that is yours, unless the government pays for it.

Sixth Amendment

In all criminal prosecutions, the accused shall enjoy the right to a speedy and public trial, by an impartial jury of the State and district wherein the crime shall have been committed; which district shall have been previously ascertained by law, and to be informed of the nature and cause of the accusation; to be confronted with the witnesses against him; to have compulsory process for obtaining witnesses in his favor; and to have the assistance of counsel for his defence.

If you're arrested, you have a right to have your trial pretty soon, and the government can't keep you in jail without trying you. The trial has to be public, so everyone knows what is happening. The case has to be decided by a jury of ordinary people from your area. You have the right to know what you are accused of, to see and hear the people who are witnesses against you, to have the government help you get witnesses on your side, and you have the right to a lawyer to help you.

Seventh Amendment

In Suits at common law, where the value in controversy shall exceed twenty dollars, the right of trial by jury shall be preserved, and no fact tried by a jury shall be otherwise reexamined in any Court of the United States, than according to the rules of common law.

You also have the right to a jury when it is a civil case (a law case between two people rather than between you and the government).

Eighth Amendment

Excessive bail shall not be required, nor excessive fines imposed, nor cruel and unusual punishments inflicted.

The government can't make you pay more than is reasonable in bail or in fines, and the government can't order you to have cruel or unusual punishments (like torture) even if you are convicted of a crime.

Ninth Amendment

The enumeration in the Constitution of certain rights shall not be construed to deny or disparage others retained by the people.

Just because these rights are listed in the Constitution doesn't mean that you don't have other rights too.

Tenth Amendment

The powers not delegated to the United States by the Constitution, nor prohibited by it to the States, are reserved to the States respectively, or to the people.

Anything that the Constitution doesn't say that Congress can do should be left up to the states, or to the people.